

MEDIA RELEASE

Launch of the Innocenti Insight:
Trafficking in Human Beings, especially Women and Children, in Africa
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Human Trafficking, Including Children, Affects Nearly All African Countries

UNICEF Study Finds That Child Trafficking Affects More Countries in Africa Than Any Other Form of Trafficking

COTONOU, BENIN (23 April 2004) – Trafficking of human beings affects every country in Africa for which data is available, either as countries of origin or destination, according to a report issued today by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre in Florence.

According to the study -- which assembles and analyzes data from across the continent -- half of African countries see trafficking in human beings as a serious problem, particularly with regard to women and children.

There are no reliable estimates on the actual number of people trafficked, but the number of countries reporting trafficking in children is two times the number of the countries reporting trafficking in women, according to the report, launched here during an African Union ministerial meeting of Ministers of Labour and Social Affairs.

“Trafficking is among the worst violations of child rights in the world,” UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy said from New York. “If we are to put an end to this brazen trade, we need courageous government leaders who will criminalize the trafficking of children in all its forms. Failure to do so is an abuse of children.”

The report looks at information from 53 African countries and provides an analysis of the patterns, root causes, and existing national and regional policy responses and effective practices.

Trafficking does not remain within Africa. In 34 percent of the African countries, the trade flows to Europe and in 26 percent of the countries flows are directed to the Middle East and Arab states. Trafficking within national borders is very common, occurring in 8 out of every 10 African countries.

The root causes of trafficking are various and often differ from country to country. Among the report's key observations: Trafficking occurs when a child's protective environment collapses from such things as conflict, economic hardship, and discrimination. Traditional attitudes and practices, early marriage, and lack of birth registration further increase the vulnerability of children and women exploitation. Lack of birth registration -- and therefore no provable national identity -- makes identifying victims especially difficult. Poverty can create a desperate situation for many women and children, making them marks for manipulation.

Other important factors are sexual and economic exploitation, including the demand for cheap domestic and agricultural labour. The conflict-related demand for child soldiers; demand related to adoption; and the trafficking in body parts also play a role and need further investigation, according to the study.

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UNICEF's approach to child trafficking is based upon an in-depth analysis of the context in which trafficking occurs. Actions can differ from one country or region to another.

"Children will only be free from trafficking when they live in a protective environment which shields them from this unconscionable violation of their rights," Bellamy said.

A protective environment includes: being in school, having strong laws that punish those who exploit children, having a government which is truly committed to fighting trafficking, and having a community which is aware of the risks children face. It also means that media raise awareness, that law enforcement is free from corruption, and that strong monitoring systems are in place to identify communities at risk.

A growing number of regional initiatives, inter-country cooperation agreements, and national policies against trafficking represent ongoing efforts to strengthen anti-trafficking efforts across Africa. The report urges African governments to adopt the following important steps against trafficking:

- The African Regional Plan of Action to Combat Trafficking in Human Beings;
- The formulation of comprehensive, integrated counter-trafficking measures targeted at multiple levels within society;
- Stronger commitments of African governments to the promotion and protection of the human rights of actual and potential trafficking victims.

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Embargoed media materials in English, French, Spanish and Italian and downloadable copies of the report in English French and Spanish are available from the IRC Newsroom:

<http://www.unicef-icdc.org/presscentre/indexNewsroom.html>

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